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Working to Rehabilitate the St. Mary

By Congressman Denny Rehburg

The St. Mary's diversion project began over 100 years ago to meet the needs of irrigators and municipalities across hundreds of miles along Montana's hi-line. The project was a vital and significant undertaking, and was accomplished after years of planning and through the diligence of Montanans with an eye toward the future.

Today, the St. Mary's facilities are failing, simply worn out after over 100 years of diligent service. Yet the need for irrigation and municipal water is as pressing as ever. Thankfully, there is again a group of dedicated and forward-thinking Montanan's, members of the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group, who are working to restore the capacity of the system, and ensure it's usefulness for generations to come. Working alongside the St. Mary's group are various state and federal agencies, most notably the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), the Bureau of Reclamation and Lt. Governor Bollinger's office. Count me among those working hard to accomplish this important goal.

Congressman Denny Rehburg looks over the St. Mary Diversion Structures while touring the St. Mary Facilities in February 2004.

Congressman Denny Rehburg

I toured the St. Mary facilities over a year ago, and have been working in Congress to facilitate a range of federal assistance for this immense project, not the least of which is federal funding. To that end there is good news. Our efforts to rehabilitate the St. Mary's diversion project cleared another hurdle in May when the House Energy & Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee, of which I am a member, included report language in support of the rehabilitation. This is the first step in the process of receiving federal funding for the extensive project.

Every year, thousands of projects are submitted to the committee for consideration and it's reassuring to know this vital project was one of the very few to receive such favorable acknowledgment. This support language will provide a crucial placeholder and increase the likelihood for funding in the finalized appropriations bill.

The St. Mary's diversion is under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Reclamation, and it's important to remember the project will require congressional authorization for this federal agency to spend federal funds. The House Energy and Water Development Appropriations Subcommittee language will also assist in accomplishing this.

I have been working closely with all the interested parties to draft the initial legislation that will give us the federal authority to begin the study stages and determine the long-term project needs. I want to thank all those who are working together to accomplish this important goal. The St. Mary's diversion project is essential to north-central Montana and I'm working to make sure the process continues to move forward.

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Focus Moves to Congress

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By John Tubbs, DNRC

After a successful Legislative session, the focus of the St. Mary rehabilitation project moves to Congress. Most recently, Senator Burns replied when questioned about the timeframe for the St. Mary rehabilitation project, "how about N-O-W" *(Great Falls Tribune, June 3, 2005)*. Senator Baucus and Representative Rehberg are both strongly behind the St. Mary Project and all three offices have requested funds to replace the St. Mary bridge and finalize engineering and environmental planning documents.

In February, Lt. Governor Bohlinger brought the St Mary Rehabilitation Working Group's request for federal funding to Washington DC. In DC the Lt. Governor met with all three Congressional Offices and received strong support for the request. He also had an opportunity to meet with Commissioner John Keys, who is head of the US Bureau of Reclamation, and his staff. Commissioner Keys told to the Lt. Governor that most states come to Washington D.C. asking for money, but few come to town bringing money to match. The Commissioner complemented the effort Montana has put together and the funding that the state has raised.

The matching funds the Commissioner was referring to was the nearly $12 million of state funding approved by the Legislature in addition to irrigator assessments and donations that residents of the Milk River Valley will provide over the next two years. Ten of the 12 million dollars was approved by the Legislature in HB 540, the bonding bill. In January, the Governor took the lead on the St. Mary project when he requested $10 million in general obligation bonds be part of the HB 540 legislation. Representative Sue Dickenson sponsored HB 540, which included bond funds for several College of Technology projects, projects on the University campuses, funds for mitigation of the Ft Belknap Water Rights Compact, and the St. Mary Project. Representative Dickenson was elated with the passage of HB 540, as it required a 2/3 vote of both houses to pass.

At its last meeting the St. Mary Working Group continued to discuss how to spend the $900,000 reclamation and development grant (RDG) provided through the DNRC. The RDG grant will provide the funds necessary to move engineering studies forward over the next year as federal funds are being sought. The grant will also fund costs associated with holding public meetings, travel to Washington DC for working group members and, additional contracted services to hire professionals where needed to succeed.

Over the course of the next 9 months, working group members will try to identify the best and most cost effective course of action. Once the preferred approach is identified, federal legislation authorizing the rehabilitation project will be drafted. Montana's Congressional Offices, the State, and the Working Group will work with Reclamation to craft legislation that hopefully will be acceptable to all parties involved.

Summary of Grants to the Milk River Basin

2005 Montana Legislature

HB 6 – Renewable Resources Grants Program

- *$100,000 to the Milk River Joint Board of Control to install new structural supports and replace expansion joints on Hall's Coulee siphon.*
- *$100,000 to the Milk River Joint Board of Control to repair the outlet structure of Sherburne Dam.*
- *$100,000 to the Paradise Valley Irrigation District for turn-out replacement.*
- *$100,000 to the Ft. Belknap Irrigation District for Sugar Factory Lateral – Phase 2.*
- *$100,000 to the Glasgow Irrigation District for Vandalia – Phase 3.*

HB 7 – Reclamation Development Grants Program

- *$900,000 to support the operations of the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group, contacted services to pursue required engineering, economic and NEPA compliance studies, and assess environmental concerns of the Blackfeet Tribe.*

HB 11 – Treasure State Endowment Program

- *$500,000 to be used as cost-share towards federal funds for replacing the county bridge carrying the siphons over the St. Mary River.*

HB 540 – Bonding for higher education and other state projects.

- *$10 million non-federal cost share for construction costs on the St. Mary Diversion Facilities. Use of these funds is restricted to a federal match on construction dollars.*
- *$9.5 million mitigation cost share for the Ft. Belknap Water Right Compact.*

HB 2 – General Appropriations Bill

- *$70,000/yr for new for senior-level engineering dedicated to the St. Mary Rehabilitation Project.*
- *$65,000/yr for new for senior-level hydrologist dedicated to the St. Mary Rehabilitation Project.*

Representatives on the Milk River JBC:

Kay Blatter	*Chairman*	*Fort Belknap Irr. Dist.*
Wade Jones	*Vice-Chairman*	*Malta Irr. Dist.*
Max Maddox	*Secretary*	*Alfalfa Valley Irr. Dist.*
Lee Cornwell	*Member*	*Glasgow Irr. Dist*
Wes Pankratz	*Member*	*Glasgow Irr. Dist.*
Ralph Snider	*Member*	*Harlem Irr. Dist.*
Brad Tilleman	*Member*	*Zurich Irr. Dist.*
Don Green	*Member*	*Malta Irr. Dist.*
Will Lechner	*Member*	*Paradise Valley Irr. Dist.*
Joe Nicholsan	*Member*	*Dodson Irr. Dist.*

Milk River Water Supply

June 23, 2005
By Jeremy Giovando, USBR

The snowmelt runoff has begun in the St. Mary basin. Streamflows continue to increase as rain and warmer weather melt the mountain snowpack. This year however the snowpack was much below normal, peaking in early April at 60 % normal. Runoff volumes this year are expected to be much below average. The May 1 forecast for the Lake Sherburne and Fresno Reservoir were 70 and 29 percent of average, respectively.

The storage for the Milk River Project is above average for this time of year. Storage for both Sherburne and Fresno Reservoirs are above average (Figures 1 & 2), and Nelson is average (Figure 3). Lake Sherburne releases were initiated on March 25 followed by diversions into the St. Mary Canal on March 27. Currently diversions to the St. Mary Canal are averaging approximately 613 cfs at the St. Mary River siphon.

Releases from Fresno Reservoir were increased starting on April 15 from the winter release of 45 cfs to approximately 150 cfs. Releases were again increased later in April to approximately 200 cfs to move water to Nelson Reservoir. Fresno Reservoir releases were increased to satisfy water demands downstream in mid May. Water deliveries began from Nelson Reservoir the first week of May.

Storage as of June 22, 2005			
Reservoir	**Storage (acre-feet)**	**% Normal**	**% Full**
Lake Sherburne	57,600	120	89
Fresno	81,200	129	88
Nelson (active)	35,800	90	60

Figure 2: Fresno Reservoir Storage

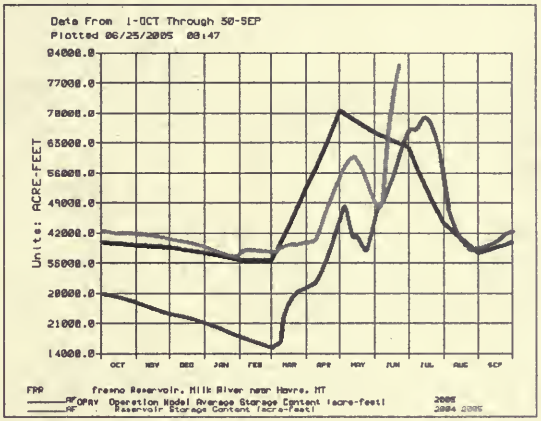


Figure 3: Nelson Reservoir Storage

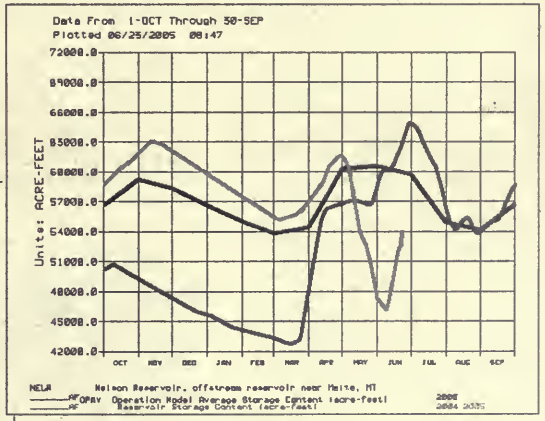
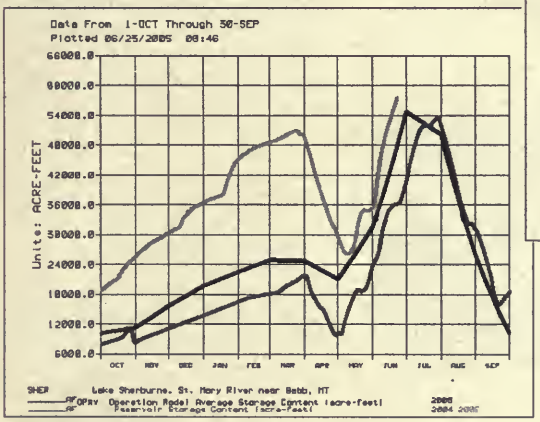


Figure 1: Lake Sherburne Storage



Hydromet Data System

By Clayton Jordan, USBR

The term Hydromet is a contraction for the words – hydrological and meteorological. The Bureau of Reclamation operates several Hydromet systems, including a network of automated hydrologic and meteorologic monitoring stations located throughout the Milk River Basin. The Hydromet stations collect remote field data and transmit it via satellite to provide real-time water management capability. Hydromet data is also integrated with other sources of information to provide streamflow forecasting and current runoff conditions for river and reservoir operations.

Hydromet consists of three databases which contain current hydrologic data and historic reservoir and streamflow records. Hydromet data can be accessed in various formats by Federal and State agencies, universities, public utilities, and agricultural users or other interested parties. Reclamation, U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), and numerous state agencies depend on Hydromet data to help make water management decisions.

The data contained in Hydromet is automatically updated frequently to provide its users with the most accurate information. Automated data collection platforms (DCP) have been installed to provide near "real-time" data. Data is collected on a timed interval (usually 15 minutes) for one to four hours. The data collected during this period is stored in the DCP. The DCP sends regularly timed transmissions of this raw data via satellite to Boise, Idaho. The satellite downlink in Boise, Idaho collects and relays the raw data to Reclamation, Great Plains Regional Office in Billings, Montana. The data is decoded, processed, formatted, and archived in the Great Plains Regional Office.

Some Hydromet stations are also set up for transmissions in the adaptive random reporting mode. These transmissions are completely unscheduled with the decision to transmit being made by the DCP. This is accomplished by programming threshold values (e.g., flood stage) in the microprocessor which the DCP uses to compare with current sensor outputs. If the threshold values are exceeded, the DCP computes a random transmission rate and begins to transmit randomly. The microprocessor also computes rates of change between sensor readings, if the rate of change exceeds the preprogrammed threshold values (e.g., river state rising at 0.2 feet per hour), this also causes the DCP to compute a random transmission rate and begin transmitting.

All data received is processed and stored in a file called DAYFILES where it is available to all users. Each morning, data stored in DAYFILES on the previous day is compiled and stored in a file called ARCHIVES. The ARCHIVES data base includes the daily average value for each parameter.

All stations have maintenance and communication costs associated with them. Reclamation and the USGS maintain most of the stations. Some of the stations maintained by the USGS are funded by Reclamation through an agreement.

A typical Hydormet Station

There are number of stations tracking canal diversions on the Milk River Project. Currently, most stations in the Milk River Project are only tracking velocity, water level, and water temperature. There is a combined effort by Reclamation and the DNRC to take several manual discharges measurements to calibrate the instruments in each canal. Once the canals are calibrated, discharges will be available on the Internet.

A newly installed pier at the Dodson South Canal Hydoromet Station makes it possible to access submerged equipment when the canal is full.

Hydromet data can be accessed via the internet at ***http://www.usbr.gov/gp/hydromet/index.cfm*** or by logging onto the VAX computer system in Billings, Montana. Registration for a user name is password is required to log onto the VAX computer system. The preferred alternative for accessing the data is the internet.

Each Hydromet station has a station code. The following is a list of some of the station codes for the Milk River Project.

Reservoirs:
SHER: Lake Sherburne
FRR: Fresno Reservoir
NELR: Nelson Reservoir

Streams and Milk River:
BABM: St. Mary River near Babb
STMB: St. Mary River at International Border
NFMA: North Fork Milk River

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above St. Mary Canal
NFMB: North Fork Milk River at International Border
SFMM: South Fork Milk River near Babb
MRMR: Milk River at Milk River, Alberta
MRWC: Milk River at Western Crossing near International Border
MREC: Milk River at Eastern Crossing near International Border
MHVM: Milk River at Havre
BSCK: Big Sandy Creek near Havre
CLCK: Clear Creek near Chinook
LCBM: Lodge Creek below McRae Creek at International Border
BCIB: Battle Creek near International Border
BACK: Battle Creek near Chinook
MRHM: Milk River near Harlem
MRDM: Milk River near Dodson
PCDM: Peoples Creek below Kuhr Coulee near Dodson
PCHM: Peoples Creek near Hays
MCCM: Milk River at Cree Crossing
BCBM: Beaver Creek near Reservation Boundary
BCHM: Beaver Creek near Hinsdale
MRTM: Milk River at Tampico

Zurich Hydromet Station near Chinook, MT.

Canals:
STMC: St. Mary Canal at St. Mary Crossing near Babb
FTBELKMT: Fort Belknap ID Canal
ALFVALMT: Alfalfa Valley ID Canal
ZURICHMT: Zurich ID Canal
PARDISMT: Paradise Valley ID Canal
HARLEMMT: Harlem Main Pumps near Zurich
HSCM: Harlem Secondary Pumps near Harlem
DODM: Dodson North Canal
DSCM: Dodson South Canal
DPCM: Dodson ID Pumps
NELFDRMT: Nelson Feeder Canal
NSCM: Nelson South Canal
GLASGOMT: Glasgow ID Canal
FBCM: Fort Belknap BIA Canal
managing our water for benefit of all water users.

Randy, Steve, and Matt are members of the St. Mary Working Group. The opinions expressed here are matters for consideration, and have not been endorsed by St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group.

To learn more visit:

http://www.dnrc.state.mt.us/stmarycover.htm

St. Mary Working Group Update

By Larry Mires

Members of the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group attended the National Water Resources Association 2005 Federal Water Seminar held April 11 to April 13 in Washington, DC. Representing the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group were Randy Reed, Co-chair of the Working Group, and Paradise Valley Irrigation District commissioner; Mike Tatsey, Director Blackfeet Water Resources Department; Randy Perez, Director Fort Belknap Indian Community Water Resources Department; and Larry Mires, Executive Director Two Rivers Economic Growth/St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group. John Tubbs, Montana DNRC and Howard Main, Fort Belknap Indian Community Council also joined the group.

The spring seminar focused around the 109th Congressional Overview and Regulatory Threats to Western Water Supply. Attendees participated in discussions with members of Congress, Congressional staffers, staff members of the House Water and Environmental Subcommittee, House and Power Subcommittee, Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Senate Fisheries, Wildlife and Water Subcommittee, members of the Corps of Engineers, and US Department of the Interior.

The Conference afforded the opportunity for the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group members to meet separately with each congressional member and their staffs to discuss the St Mary Rehabilitation and bring them up-to-date on the latest activities. All three congressional offices are well aware of the problem and the difficulties surrounding the solutions. Senator Burns, Senator Baucus, and Congressman Rehberg all pledged their full support to finding a long-term workable solution to the problem.

Of special significance was the personal meeting with, the Honorable John W. Keys, III, Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, and Mark Limbaugh, Deputy Commissioner. This meeting was arranged through Senator Conrad Burns's office and attended by representatives of both Senator Max Baucus and Congressman Denny Rehberg, and members of the US Bureau of Reclamation/Interior Congressional and Legislative Affairs Commissioner's Office. The delegation was able to have open and frank discussions on the condition of the St Mary facilities and the potential for its catastrophic failure. Randy Reed commented: "The meeting with Reclamation was one of most productive meetings in recent years."

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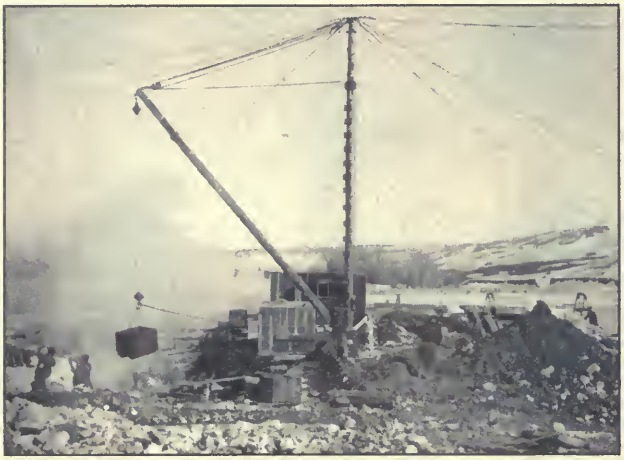

Excavating middle pier of St. Mary River Bridge, circa 1915

The Fiscal '06 Federal funding requests are:

- *$3 million to prepare engineering, economic, cultural resources, and NEPA compliance studies necessary to rehabilitate or replace the St. Mary Diversion Facilities;*
- *$2 million to construct a county bridge over the St. Mary River;*
- *$1 million to complete studies necessary to address impacts on Blackfeet Reservation related to operations of the St. Mary Diversion Facilities;*
- *$500,000 to assess the current status and future needs of the Blackfeet Irrigation Project; and*
- *$250,000 to provide Blackfeet Tribal vocational programs associated with rehabilitation of the St. Mary Diversion Facilities.*

In February of 2005, the State of Montana, with the support of the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group, requested $6.75 million in federal funding. Matching this federal request, the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group requested and received $900,000 in funds from the Montana Legislature to support engineering and environmental investigations and an additional $10.6 million in construction funds. In addition, local governments and citizens throughout the Milk River Basin raised $100,000 in 2004 and have set a goal to raise another $150,000 in 2005 to address the immediate needs of the project and to hire a full time director. The Montana Legislature, tribal governments, municipalities, county commissioners, along with Hi-Line citizens have recognized the vast importance of this project by providing resources to address these critical facilities.

The investigations and rehabilitation of the infrastructure will require an appropriation of federal funds need to be appropriated, authorizing the Bureau of Reclamation to work with the State, the Blackfeet Tribe, and in turn the St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group and the interests that they represent. Not withstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, these appropriations must authorize the Department of Interior to enter into cooperative agreements with the State of Montana and the Blackfeet Tribe. The funds must be non-reimbursable as they provide federal match to state and local dollars.

Federal funds are needed now as time is of the essence. Catastrophic failure is not an option nor is the loss of the Hi-line economy that would ensue. Together, local, state, tribal, and federal resources must be galvanized to secure the future of the Milk River Basin.

The St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group would like to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to all the support shown across Montana. This truly is a Montana partnership.

Construction of the left siphon which was buried – St. Mary Crossing, circa 1915

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St. Mary Siphon Bridge as it looks today

For a meeting agenda and additional information visit the Working Group website at ***www.dnrc.state.mt.us/stmarycover.htm***

or contact Paul Azevedo
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or Larry Mires
– Interim Executive Director,
St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group at Two Rivers Economic Growth, Inc.,
74 4th St N., Glasgow, Mt 59230,
(406) 263-8402 email trg@nemontel.net

St. Mary diversion dam with the old bridge as it looks today

Northeast Montana heads into July lush and green after a wet June. Heavy rains have also brought flooding on Milk River Tributaries. Larb Creek left its banks on June 29, flooding fields and this county road southeast of Saco.

If you have ideas for articles or news items, please contact:

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